



**TOUR INFORMATION FOR BOLIVIA:
Northern Andes, Madidi National Park and Barba Azul**

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read this carefully.

ENTERING BOLIVIA: United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished. British citizens do not require a visa. Tourist cards are prepared by your arriving airline. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest Bolivian Embassy for entry requirements.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get a replacement if your original is lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopy in a separate bag to the originals.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: The tour begins in La Paz and ends in Santa Cruz. There will be an introductory meeting at our La Paz hotel at 20:00 (with dinner on your own beforehand). This informal meeting affords the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip: pace of the tour, daily routine, etc. Some flights arrive very early in the morning, and you may be tempted to arrive in the early morning hours of Day 2, but we strongly recommend arriving on Day 1 or even a day or two early to begin to acclimate to the elevation. We will be happy to make hotel arrangements for you and recommend our starting hotel.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Bolivia is 5 hours behind British Summer Time (GMT -4).

CURRENCY: The local currency is the *boliviano*. Although your basic expenses on tour are covered, it's a good idea to have about USD \$20 worth of bolivianos for incidental expenses, gifts, alcohol, and tips for personal services. The best way to obtain cash is from ATMs, which can be found in the Santa Cruz airport and in Cochabamba; one may also use the foreign exchange desk in the airport upon arrival and might also be able to exchange cash at the hotel in Santa Cruz. Dollars are not widely accepted outside the major cities.

LANGUAGE: Spanish is spoken everywhere, even if as a second language for Quechua and Aymara people. Our leader speaks Spanish, so you will not be required to converse in the language. However, you may want to consider bringing a Latin American Spanish phrase book. It may be helpful to you in negotiating simple hotel and restaurant situations when the leader is not around.

CLIMATE: We will be nearing the end of the dry season and at the beginning of the rainy season, so weather is highly unpredictable and according to elevation quite variable. It will likely be mostly sunny and hot in the lowlands and cool with cold mornings in the high elevations. The highest elevations will likely be sunny and dry with morning temperatures around freezing. The cloud forest areas could get persistent to intermittent rain, mist, or fog at any time, and the approach of a late cold front could alter things rapidly anywhere, bringing similar weather to every elevation, where even in the tropical lowlands low temperatures could drop to the upper 40's and highs only into the 60's. Otherwise temperatures should stay between 50-90°F for most of the tour; warmer temperatures are possible at the lowest elevations during the latter half of the tour.

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ALTITUDE. We will be going over a pass of 15,230 feet (4640 metres) on two days, although if we stop there we will do only a bit of walking on the roadside. Keep in mind that El Alto International airport is the highest in the world at 13,325 feet (4062 m), and our hotel is at 12,630 feet (3850 m). At these altitudes, many people experience nothing more than lightheadedness and a need to take deeper breaths with only a little exertion; some just find it exhilarating. But some experience a delayed effect of nausea and headache which will eventually disappear after you acclimate in several hours. Highly recommended as a prophylaxis for altitude sickness is Acetazolamide. Please consult your doctor if you think high elevation may be an issue for you. While altitude sickness can be mitigated by taking aspirin or ibuprofen and drinking plenty of water, taking Acetazolamide starting the day before you arrive in Bolivia is a good way to avoid them altogether.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Early mornings and full birding days will be the rule, but we always try to be back at the hotel well before dark and allow at least hour off before dinner most days. Sunrise is around 06:00 and sunset at 18:30. While we are driving, daily departures from the hotel are usually around 05:00 to 05:30, depending on the length of the drive, and we are back to the hotel by about 17:00 to 17:30. Some days we may leave as early as 04:00, with an excellent picnic breakfast in the field prepared by our drivers. Days are long, but walking distances will be short. While at Sadiri and Barba Azul, days are more relaxed as we'll be on foot most days and will have chances for siestas after lunch as well as the option to quit earlier in the morning. However, keep in mind we'll be on our feet for more hours of the day, which some find even more tiring despite the time off for siestas.

During the first part of the tour, birding will be on dirt or paved roadsides, though we'll occasionally want to walk off the road in the tundra-like puna, which will have some uneven footing, rocks to navigate, and some gentle slope. Such off-road walks will be optional, where you may sit in the van. Our first day may in fact involve the least amount of walking, up to about 1 kilometre, but keep in mind that this will be at 13,850 feet, it may be windy and cold, and you may be jet lagged, and it could therefore feel like a strenuous day by the end.

At Sadiri and Barba Azul, the farthest we walk from the lodge is about a mile and a half. Walking sticks are highly recommended.

Everything at Sadiri is hilly – it's located on the crest of the outermost ridge of the Andes. The cabins farthest from the dining hall require ascending about 175 steps over 200 metres to get to the dining hall. Some trails have short steep sections, and having a hiking stick will be useful for many of these sections.

Nearly all birding at Barba Azul is done by foot, with hikes up to 1 1/2 miles each way, though we plan to not be out during the hottest hours of the day, with a long siesta after lunch. Barba Azul is very flat, but the trail surface is often very uneven with roots or dirt clods. There is also much less shade there, so be prepared to have a hat and carry water. We use a small boat to cross the Omi River once or twice, and there will likely be mud and water up to a foot deep when getting out of the boat on the far side. Depending on recent weather, there also may be mud or standing water up to a foot deep on the 3/4-mile trail to where we look for Cock-tailed Tyrant (or it may be bone dry). The lodge has rubber boots to borrow for these two places, but it is also an option to wear rugged outdoor sandals or shoes that you don't mind getting wet and muddy.

Throughout the tour we do lots of standing and watching, and we generally move very slowly. If this tends to tire your lower back, a small, lightweight travel stool that you can carry with a strap over your shoulder would be useful.

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HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

A Yellow Fever vaccination is recommended and is mandatory to enter Bolivia if arriving from a country where Yellow Fever is present.

Malaria: Malaria is very rare where we are. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Leishmaniasis: Tiny phlebotomine flies (technically called sand flies but not related to the gnats that bite in sandy areas) carrying the *Leishmania* parasite do exist at lower elevations in Bolivia, but the risk is not high, as we rarely see the insect, and not all are vectors. If the insect is seen (it looks like a tiny, pale mosquito and is active only from dawn to dusk), the leader will point it out; steps to avoid exposure are the same as for mosquitoes.

Insects: Mosquitoes will generally not be problem as we are here during the end of the dry season, but there may be small biting gnats, especially in the cloud forest and at Refugio Los Volcanes when it is sunny. Refugio is a transition zone to Amazonian foothill forest, so mosquitoes or sand flies could be here in the evening, and one should be protected. The best defence against any insects is to wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers, especially in the evenings and to use repellent on exposed skin. Roadside vegetation may have chiggers in the lower elevations, and we'll do our best to avoid them.

Careful application of insect repellent to trousers and socks provides good protection and the leader will advise you when it will be necessary.

In the Neotropic lowlands and humid areas, chiggers are the main invertebrate nuisance, causing itchy and often persistent welts, usually on ankles and waistbands. These appear a full day after the nearly microscopic critters have imbibed their fill of externally digested epidermis and have fallen off otherwise undetected. We also recommend that you treat your clothing with permethrin one to a few days before you leave home. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Camping supply stores sell sprays containing 0.5% permethrin, while online sources also offer pump sprays as well as a more economical 10% concentrate which you dilute and then treat clothing (trousers, shirts, and sock cuffs – no underwear) by soaking it in a large bag and then hanging it out to dry; be sure to look into this option well in advance of the tour, especially if you live in a cooler, moister climate.

Miscellaneous: One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. Please consult with your physician. We avoid tap water; filtered and bottled water are readily available. Gastrointestinal problems are always a possibility while traveling; you may want to bring Imodium or some other reliable anti-diarrhea medication. You also may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections. Sun and UV exposure in the higher elevations can be very intense. Please bring adequate protection, including a sun hat and a strong sun screen of at least 15 rating. Snakes of any kind are rarely encountered in the tropics, and we will be lucky to see one. Furthermore, venomous species are in the minority in the Americas, and we spend very little time on trails in the humid lowlands where one would have the greatest chance of finding one. Still, it's always something to keep in mind.

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It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION: We'll be staying in hotels and lodges with a wide variety of comfort levels, some excellent and modern, others basic but clean and safe. Most offer rooms with private bathrooms and all have hot water showers (usually heated with an electric coil at the shower head, some with gas). At Apolo we'll be staying in a monastery; rooms are very simple but clean and have private bathrooms.

Our one hotel in Charazani (where we stay two nights) does not have private bathrooms for most rooms. One must also bring a towel here.

Sadiri has six large, very nice double-occupancy cabins, each with a private bathroom, so single rooms may be available but not be guaranteed here, depending on the group size and makeup. The cabins are quite spread out on a complex of branching trails; the farthest is about 200 metres from the dining hall and down a series of 150+ steps, so this place isn't ideal for anyone with weak knees or who has trouble with steps.

Barba Azul has four rustic solidly-built double cabins with private bath and four dormitory-style rooms with two shared bathrooms. Depending on group size, doubles will be given preference in the cabins, and anyone requesting single rooms may be in the dormitories. The cabins are very spread out and private, the farthest cabin being about 320 metres from the common area and dining hall. The shared bathrooms in the dorms do not have hot water showers.

Our hotels in Titicaca and Trinidad are modern but simple, while our La Paz and final night's hotel in Santa Cruz are much more upscale. All hotels offer standard amenities, though you may want to bring your own shampoo and washcloth.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Two-day laundry service will be available at most of our hotels if the services is requested upon arrival.

ELECTRICITY: Full-time electricity will be available at all our lodging, except Barba Azul, where a generator provides electricity for a few hours each morning and evening. In general, one should be prepared for a limited number of outlets in your room and occasional power outages no matter where we are. Wattage and amplitude in Bolivia is almost always 220/50, but the outlet shape provides for both flat parallel prongs and round prongs. Check out <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com/bolivia> for more information.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: None of our lodges has internet as most of these are located in rural areas. There are no internet cafés either. Even in the cities internet access is poor however this is something the country is trying to correct.

FOOD: We will start most days with early breakfasts. While on the road at the start we'll have picnic lunches, but the rest will be at our lodges. Dinners will usually be at our hotels or lodges and usually include a simple but delicious cut of meat or fish with sides of steamed vegetables, rice and french fries.

Coffee on our picnics and in simpler restaurants all over Bolivia is instant (usually Nescafe), but we should have the real thing at our lodges. But if you require something of higher quality, you might consider bringing your own.

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Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water and/or a soft drink, beer or wine is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room etc. is the responsibility of the individual. We also try to keep bottled water on the minibus for 'emergency' use during the day.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is informal throughout. The best approach to the variable climate is to take several layers of clothing that can be added or subtracted according to changes in temperature. The following items are basic:

Lightweight wool or wool-blend field socks	Sun hat
Long-sleeved cotton or fast-drying microfibre shirts	T-shirts
Lightweight sweater	Lightweight gloves
Sturdy hiking boots for day hikes	Fleece or heavier sweater
Light cotton or fast-drying micro-weave trousers	Warm cap
Lightweight raincoat or windbreaker	Wind/rain-proof trousers
Shorts (for time spent in the hotels, but not recommended in the field)	

Note: We recommend not wearing brightly-coloured clothing in the field. Birds are particularly sensitive to movement, and such bright colours will accentuate it.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pen	Alarm clock
Torch, or headlamp, and spare batteries	Compact umbrella
Small day pack	Insect repellent
Sunglasses and Sunscreen	Water bottle
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Hiking stick
Wash cloth (not provided by some hotels)	Pocket knife
Small, collapsible travel stool	Rubber flip-flops for showers
Personal medication	Shampoo and Towel

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), and field guide.

Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings.

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Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will have a telescope, a spotlight, a first aid kit, maps and copies of the more important field guides and references, as well as portable electronic playback equipment and laser pointer.

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need during the tour. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not available for this activity.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: Our transport will be either minibus, small bus, or a combination of utility vehicles, depending on the size of the group. Participants should be able to sit in any of the vehicle's seats.

The transfer from La Paz to Rurrenabaque for the lowland part of the tour is in a modern jet such as a Bombardier CRJ-100.

While at Barba Azul we'll occasionally take a short (10-minute) boat ride down the Rio Omi to get to the opposite side; each boat seats five and is an open, aluminium outboard. To and from Barba Azul we'll be in 500-kg capacity, 5- passenger Cessnas aircraft; one flight is about 30 minutes, the other 45 minutes.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

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If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Field guides:

Herzog, S. K., et al. 2017. *Birds of Bolivia Field Guide*. Long awaited, this indispensable book is unfortunately not available in the U.K. yet. The leader will have a copy, and we should be able to acquire some from our ground agent or at the lodges; cost is about \$50.

General references:

Fjeldså, Jon and N. Krabbe. 1990. *Birds of the High Andes: A Manual to the Birds of the Temperate Zone of the Andes and Patagonia, South America*. Apollo, Denmark. A guide to South America's higher elevation species, covering most of those not included in Hilty et al. Although heavy, expensive, and very poorly bound, it is worth studying prior to the tour.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Scribner. A superb and very readable introduction to the ecology of tropical rain forests. **Recommended**.

Hilty, S. L. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT. Excellent treatment of natural history of Neotropical birds.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references, at least those in print, are available from booksellers specializing in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

MAPS Country maps are available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB: Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at www.neotropicalbirdclub.org

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your air tickets, will be sent to you about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.